

A Christmas Spaghetti  
by W.R. Smith

"Hmm. What did you call these again?"

Reaching into the musty, wrinkled, cardboard box he pulled out a sample. Tiny Christmas lights on green cord with crumpled strands of interspersed silver tinsel hung like so much seaweed from his hand.

"Fairy-lights," she said.

"Is that right?"

"Uh-huh," she affirmed.

"Well, if you ask me..."

Unceremoniously he dumped the box over spilling the contents in a pile on the living room floor. He tossed the box aside.

"It looks awfully like a wicked spell has been cast on your Fairy-lights," he said.

"You should have seen how beautiful it was here last year," She waved her hand about as she spoke. "We had mixed colors over all the doorways and twinklers on the tree and the entrance way. It was just beautiful."

"You have enough here to mark out a private airstrip I think. Who packed this box like this anyway?"

"I don't remember," she said.

"Well," he picked up his jacket from where it lay on the couch. "Obviously we're better off taking a trip to Wally-World for some less tangled Christmas cheer..."

"Oh no. This will sort out just fine," she said

"I'd rather not," and he pressed one eye with the palm of his hand. "Gives me a headache just looking at it."

Ignoring his statement she knelt before the pile and picked out the end of one string of lights and started untangling.

"Sit down with me," she said. "We've got to hang these on the tree before I can put on the ornaments."

Without any degree of enthusiasm he dropped his jacket on the couch and sat down cross-legged; the mass of tangles between them.

"What a big plate of spaghetti!" he complained.

She blew a kiss.

He slowly threaded a cord through a few tangles which at first was easy enough but, as expected, the process became tedious. Quitting that he picked up another cord and worked it the same short lived course. Watching as he started anew on a third and then a fourth cord she wondered at him.

"I think I've got the hang of it," she said. "Like this."

As she illustrated he watched her hands and her expression in turns. Her progress inevitably slowing as the free cord she worked lengthened; nearly every bulb catching as she passed it through another tangle. Finally, making the most of her meager progress she held up three feet of cord and light bulbs.

"Oh I see what you mean," he said. "Like this?"

He held up for answer three cords he had previously loosened; each about the same length as hers.

"You didn't watch me," she said.

"I may have missed something."

She began another example. Painstakingly she came up with another short length of

cord.

"You are doing no better than I am," he said.

"But you might do even better if you quit doing several tangles at once. It's too frustrating. I am taking mine one at a time."

"I do several at once because I can. If it's so frustrating to you--don't look at it," he said.

"Well you don't seem able to finish any of them."

"I see you didn't finish one either," he said.

"I was only trying to show you."

"Well when you can finish one then maybe you might have something to say," he said.

That spoken sentiment hurt her feelings and knowing it, in turn, shamed him. In silence they resumed the pile of Christmas lights and worked their different approaches for some time. For her it was an interesting revelation; how he could suddenly make her feel. But, she pushed that concern back from the fore of her thoughts as an object to inspect more thoroughly later.

"Ah!" she said suddenly. "I know what's missing--a little Christmas music."

He watched her climbing to her feet.

"Do you have anything else," he said.

"It's the season! We could have some eggnog and Christmas music to get with the spirit..."

"Twenty-three days to come is hardly Christmas," he said. "You don't want to wear that stuff out before then."

She sat back down.

"You don't like Christmas music."

"Not too much," he said. "Now that I think about it let me re-phrase that--definitely not. I mean the whole sleigh-bells ringing and chestnuts roasting thing. Come on. What century is this anyway?"

She watched him while he worked another tangle.

"What else don't you like?"

"I am just saying," he replied.

"Fine. Go on saying then. What else don't you like?"

"Don't. Just let it go. I am doing what you want here aren't I?"

He continued with the tangles at hand while she was feeling heat rise up the back of her neck. She wondered where this was all coming from and where it was all going. The fact that he was so suddenly concerned with nothing but the Christmas lights egged on her disappointment.

As articulately and evenly as her temper would allow she expressed to him she didn't like how he was acting and if he was so unhappy about being there there were other options. She would certainly rather do it all alone than get dumped on in some bizarre fashion and so out of the blue. She expressed many things along that line to him. She didn't actually say any of them but she expressed it all the same with her eyes--which, as is common knowledge, are the windows to the soul. Unfortunately he was not looking into her soul nor for that matter her eyes. To her he was just sitting there plucking lamely at tangles.

But she resolved to hold her tongue. It was more than she wanted to deal with. Her hand felt and searched about for the loose cords she had started but she couldn't seem to find one anywhere in the pile where they had fallen. Anyway her vision was beginning to mist.

Finally when a single tear fell where she searched for her lost cord she suddenly felt a warm hand take hold of hers. She looked up. He leaned over the tangles between them.

"Hey," he said.

Her hand tightened on his. And in this silent moment the windows on their souls did open. And in silence they touched each other for the first time that afternoon--in one sense for the first time.

"Come here," he said.

"No," she hiccuped. "You--come here."

Holding her fingertips he moved and sat down beside her. With an arm, each for one another, pulling close, she rested her head against him. He kissed her hair.

"I am sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to."

"Why did we do that?"

"We... I was being an ass," he said.

"I knoww," and her hiccup harbored a little laugh.

Outside cars passed each other on the street going somewhere; different each one. People muffled up against the North wind of the early winter season too went their individual ways. Shopping, restaurants, the office, home--all bustling somewhere. Escalators, elevators, stairs; both up and down. On the street, off the sidewalk, where bicycles and taxis, buses and cars push ever forward. Even the sky above is host to an invisible grid of planes criss-crossing the limitless. Everything is going somewhere. Everyone.

But somehow, despite all this, there were at least two people who didn't figure in the great bustle. For the moment there were two--

who simply had each other and were simply there.

"I feel better now."

With a kiss she leaned back to look at him.

"Me too."

She rubbed her face of the wetness; her eyes a little red.

"But..." she said.

"But what?" he said.

"But what are we going to do about all this?"

She said it as if a little afraid of the tangled mass of Christmas lights with loosened strings radiating upon the floor before them.

"I have an idea," he said.

He leaned over the fairy-lights, as she had called them, and finding one loose end plugged it into another. Then he did the same again for another and another. She didn't exactly know why but she joined him in connecting any loose ends they found until all was done. He got to his feet and closed the window shades while she stretched the remaining free plug-end to the nearest wall socket.

"Wait!" he said. He turned off the room lights.

With a spark the half untangled mass of lights came to life in tiny reds and yellows, greens, whites and blues and in another moment the twinkling lights began to wink.

"It's beautiful," she said.

"One last touch."

He bent down and with both hands grasped the center of the pile and gave the whole thing a slight twist--giving the effect of a swirl, still and captured in time. And she saw it too. They seemed to be standing, floating, together over a distant galaxy; a mass of stars. A wonderful glowing tangle from afar.

"Oh!" she breathed.

"And, if you ask me," he said kneeling and touching one tiny pink globe in the midst. "I am pretty sure we are right here."

She knelt beside him. "I can see us."

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